

CRIES FROM THE CROSS

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A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 27, 1898
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 2, 1856*

*“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
why art thou so far from helping me,
and from the words of my roaring?”*
Psalm 22:1

*This was the first evening sermon preached by Mr. Spurgeon after the fatal calamity at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, two weeks previously. On commencing his discourse, he said, “The observations I have to make will be very brief, seeing that afterwards we are to partake of the Lord’s supper. I shall make no allusion to the recent catastrophe—that theme of my daily thoughts and nightly dreams, ever since it has occurred. I hope however, to improve that event at some future period.” This Mr. Spurgeon did, in many memorable utterances which will be included in Vol. II of his *Autobiography*, now in course of compilation.

WE here behold the Savior in the depths of His agonies and sorrows. No other place so well shows the griefs of Christ as Calvary, and no other moment at Calvary is as full of agony as that in which this cry rends the air, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” At this moment, physical weakness, brought upon Him by fasting and scourging, was united with the acute mental torture which He endured from the shame and ignominy through which He had to pass, and as the culmination of His grief, He suffered spiritual agony, which surpasses all expression on account of the departure of His Father from Him. This was the blackness and darkness of His horror, then it was that He penetrated the depths of the caverns of suffering.

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” There is something in these words of our Savior always calculated to benefit us. When we behold the sufferings of men, they afflict and appall us, but the sufferings of our Savior, while they move us to grief, have about them something sweet, and full of consolation. Here, even here, in this black spot of grief, we find our heaven, while gazing upon the cross. This, which might be thought a frightful sight, makes the Christian glad and joyous. If he laments the cause, yet he rejoices in the consequences.

I. First, in our text, there are THREE QUESTIONS to which I shall call your attention.

The first is, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” By these words we are to understand that our blessed Lord and Savior was at that moment forsaken by God in such a manner as He had never been before. He had battled with the enemy in the desert, but thrice He overcame him, and cast him to the earth. He had striven with that foe all His life long, and even in the garden He had wrestled with him till His soul was “exceeding sorrowful.” It is not till now that He experiences a depth of sorrow which He never felt before. It was necessary that He should suffer in the stead of sinners, just what sinners ought to have suffered. It would be difficult to conceive of punishment for sin apart from the frown of Deity.

With crime we always associate anger, so that when Christ died, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God”—when our blessed Savior became our Substitute, He became, for the time, the victim of His Father’s righteous wrath, seeing that our sins had been imputed to Him, in order that His righteousness might be imputed to us. It was necessary that He should feel the loss of His Father’s smile—for the condemned in hell must have tasted of that bitterness—and therefore the Father closed

the eye of His love, put the hand of justice before the smile of His face, and left His Son to cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

There is no man living who can tell the full meaning of these words, not one in heaven or on earth,— I had almost said, in hell, there is not a man who can spell these words out with all their depth of misery. Some of us think at times, that *we* could cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” There are seasons when the brightness of our Father’s smile is eclipsed by clouds and darkness. But let us remember that God never really forsakes us. It is only a seeming forsaking with us, but in Christ’s case it was a real forsaking. God only knows how much we grieve sometimes, at a little withdrawal of our Father’s love, but the real turning away of God’s face from His Son—who shall calculate how deep the agony which it caused Him when He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

In our case, this is the cry of unbelief, in His case, it was the utterance of a fact, for God had really turned away from Him for a time. O you poor, distressed soul who once lived in the sunshine of God’s face, but are now in darkness—you who are walking in the valley of the shadow of death, you hear noises, and you are afraid, your soul is startled within you, you are stricken with terror if you think that God has forsaken you! Remember that He has not really forsaken you, for—

*“Mountains when in darkness shrouded,
Are as real as in day.”*

God in the clouds is as much our God as when He shines forth in all the luster of His benevolence, but since even the *thought* that He has forsaken us gives us agony, what must the agony of the Savior have been when He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

The next question is, “*Why art thou so far from helping me?*” Up to now, God had helped His Son, but now He must tread the winepress alone, and even His own Father cannot be with Him. Have you not felt sometimes, that God has brought you to do some duty, and yet has apparently not given you the strength to do it? Have you never felt that sadness of heart which makes you cry, “Why art thou so far from helping me?” But if God means you to do anything, you can do it, for He will give you the power.

Perhaps your brain reels, but God has ordained that you must do it, and you shall do it. Have you not felt as if you must go on even while, every step you took, you were afraid to put your foot down for fear you should not get a firm foothold? If you have had any experience of divine things, it must have been so with you. We can scarcely guess what it was that our Savior felt when He said, “Why art thou so far from helping me?” His work is one which none but a divine Person could have accomplished, yet His Father’s eye was turned away from Him! With more than herculean labors before Him, but with none of His Father’s might given to Him, what must have been the strain upon Him! Truly, as Hart says, He—

*“Bore all incarnate God could bear,
With strength enough, and none to spare.”*

The third inquiry is, “*Why art thou so far from the words of My roaring?*” The word here translated “roaring” means, in the original Hebrew, that deep, solemn groan which is caused by serious sickness, and which suffering men utter. Christ compares His prayers to those roars, and complains that God is so far from Him that He does not hear Him.

Beloved, many of us can sympathize with Christ here. How often have we on our knees asked some favor of God, and we thought we asked in faith, yet it never came! Down we went upon our knees again. There is something which withholds the answer, and with tears in our eyes, we have wrestled with God again, we have pleaded, for Jesu’s sake, but the heavens have seemed like brass. In the bitterness of our spirit, we have cried, “Can there *be* a God?” And we have turned round and said, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from the words of my roaring?” Is this like You? Do You ever spurn a sinner? Have You not said, ‘Knock, and it shall be opened unto thee?’ Are You reluctant to be kind? Do You withhold Your promise?”

And when we have been almost ready to give up, with everything apparently against us, have we not *groaned*, and said, “Why art thou so far from the words of my roaring?” Though we know something, it is not much that we can truly understand of those direful sorrows and agonies which our blessed Lord endured when He asked these three questions, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”

II. Let us now, in the second place, ANSWER THESE THREE QUESTIONS.

The answer to the first question I have given before. I think I hear the Father say to Christ, “*My Son, I forsake Thee because Thou standest in the sinner’s stead.*” As You are holy, just, and true, I never would forsake *You*, I would never turn away from *You*, for even as a man, You have been holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, but on Your head does rest the guilt of every penitent, transferred from him to You, and You must expiate it by Your blood. Because You stand in the sinner’s stead, I will not look at You till You have borne the full weight of My vengeance. *Then*, I will exalt You on high, far above all principalities and powers.”

O Christian, pause here and reflect! Christ was punished in this way for you! Oh, see that countenance so wrung with horror, those horrors gather there for you! Perhaps, in your own esteem, you are the most worthless of the family, certainly the most insignificant, but the meanest lamb of Christ’s flock is as much the object of purchase as any other. Yes, when that black darkness gathered round His brow, and when He cried out, “Eloi, Eloi,” in the words of our text, for the Lord Omnipotent to help Him, when He uttered that awfully solemn cry, it was because He loved *you*, because He gave Himself for *you*, that you might be sanctified here, and dwell with Him hereafter. God forsook Him, therefore, first because He was the sinner’s Substitute.

The answer to the second question is, “*Because I would have Thee get all the honor to Thyself*, therefore I will not help You, lest I should have to divide the spoil with You.” The Lord Jesus Christ lived to glorify His Father, but He died to glorify Himself, in the redemption of His chosen people. God says, “No, My Son, You shall do it alone, for You must wear the crown alone, and upon Your person shall all the regalia of Your sovereignty be found. I will give You all the praise, and therefore You shall accomplish all the labor.” He was to tread the winepress alone, and to get the victory and glory alone to Himself.

The answer to the third question is essentially the same as the answer to the first. *To have heard Christ’s prayers at that time would have been inappropriate.* This turning away of the divine Father from hearing His Son’s prayer, is just in keeping with His condition, as the sinner’s Surety, His prayer must not be heard, as the sinner’s Surety, He could say, “Now that I am here, dying in the sinner’s stead, You seal Your ears against My prayer.” God did not hear His Son, because He knew His Son was dying to bring us near to God, and the Son therefore cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

III. In conclusion, I shall offer you A WORD OF EARNEST EXPOSTULATION AND OF AFFECTIONATE WARNING.

Is it nothing to some of you that Jesus should die? You hear the tale of Calvary, but alas! You have dry eyes. You never weep concerning it. Is the death of Jesus nothing to you? Alas! it seems to be so with many. Your hearts have never throbbed in sympathy with Him.

O friends, how many of you can look on Christ, thus agonizing and groaning, and say, “He is *my* Ransom, *my* Redeemer”? Could you say, with Christ, “*My God*”? Or is God another’s, and not yours? Oh, if you are out of Christ, hear me speak one word, it is a word of *warning*! Remember, *to be out of Christ, is to be without hope*, if you die unsprinkled with His blood, you are lost. *And what is it to be lost*? I shall not try to tell you the meaning of that dreadful word “*lost*.” Some of you may know it before another sun has risen. God grant that you may not!

Do you desire to know how you may be saved? Hear me. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” To be baptized is to be buried in water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Have you believed in Christ? Have you professed faith in

Christ? Faith is the grace which rests alone on Christ. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he should feel himself to be lost—that he should know himself to be a ruined sinner, and then he should believe this, “It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” even the very chief.

You need no mediator between yourselves and Christ. You may come to Christ just as you are—guilty, wicked, poor, just as you are, Christ will take you. There is no necessity for washing beforehand. You want no riches, in Him you have *all* you require, will you bring anything to “*all*”? You want no garments, for in Christ you have a seamless robe which will amply suffice to cover even the biggest sinner on earth, as well as the least.

Come, then, to Jesus at once. Do you say you do not know *how* to come? Come just as you are. Do not wait to *do* anything. What you want is to leave off doing, and let Christ do all for you. What do you want to do, when He has done all? All the labor of your hands can never fulfill what God commands. Christ died for sinners, and you must say, “Sink or swim, I will have no other Savior but Christ.” Cast yourself wholly upon Him—

*“And when thine eye of faith is dim,
Still trust in Jesus, sink or swim;
Still at His footstool humbly bow,
O sinner! sinner! Prostrate now!”*

He is able to pardon you at this moment. There are some of you who know you are guilty, and groan concerning it. Sinner, why tarry you? “Come, and welcome!” is My Master’s message to you. If you feel you are lost and ruined, there is not a barrier between you and heaven, Christ has broken it down. If you know your own lost estate, Christ has died for you, believe, and come! Come, and welcome, sinner, come! O sinner, come! Come! Come! Jesus bids you come, and as His ambassador to you, I bid you come, as one who would *die* to save your souls if it were necessary—as one who knows how to groan over you, and to weep over you—one who loves you even as he love himself! I, as His minister, say to you, in God’s name, and in Christ’s stead, “Be ye reconciled to God.”

What say you? Has God made you willing? Then rejoice! Rejoice, for He has not made you willing without giving you the power to do what He has made you willing to do. Come! Come! This moment you may be as sure of heaven as if you were there, if you cast yourself upon Christ, and have nothing but Jesus for your soul’s reliance.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.